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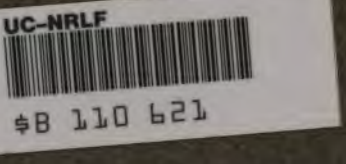

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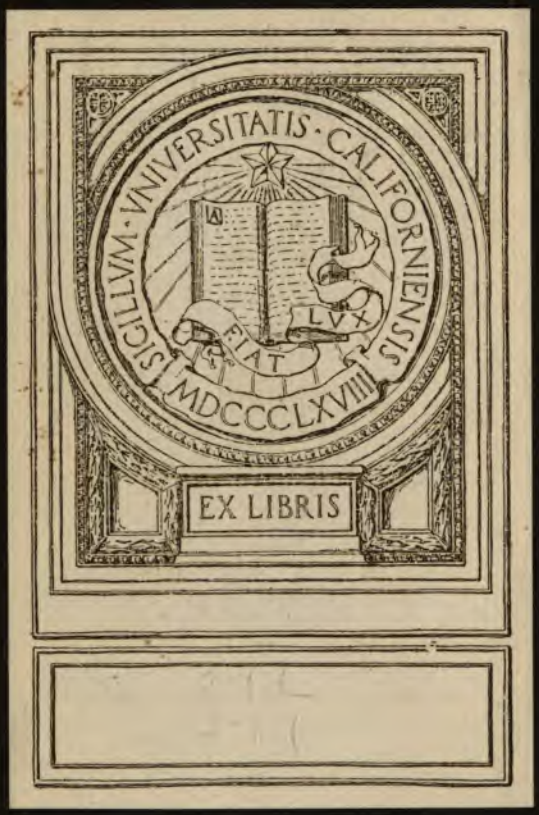
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The Carpenter's Son
The Leader of Men

A Christmas Preparation Sermon

by

Jenkin Lloyd Jones

Unity Publishing Company
Chicago, 1904

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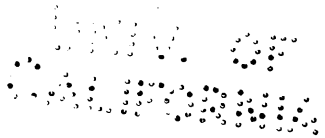

THE CARPENTER'S SON—THE LEADER OF MEN.

A CHRISTMAS PREPARATION SERMON BY JENKIN LLOYD JONES, DELIVERED IN ALL SOULS CHURCH, CHICAGO, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11, 1904.

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father. —*John* 1:14.

I am compelled to think of Jesus of Nazareth as an epoch-marking soul, an era-forming spirit, a character in whom the light of an illustrious race and a holy ancestry was focalized, a personality from which radiated that subtle, creative power of the spirit which defies all analysis, which baffles definition, which overflows all words.

Outside the realm of religion we sometimes try to indicate this power by the word "genius;" within the realms of religion it is called "inspiration," "revelation," "incarnation," the words varying with the standpoint of the speaker. Whatever it is, I am compelled to think of him as one who won the right of pre-eminence in the world's history; one to whom it was given to be the source of a religious movement beyond his seeking and in very many respects different from his thinking. He was a man destined to be enveloped in a mystic mantle of myth, legend and dogma which a loving constituency wove out of the poetry that belongs to the common heart of man.

This man is best understood and most truly measured by the comparative method. He is best studied when placed among his giant companions—Moses, Zoroaster, Confucius, Buddha, Sokrates and Mohammed. All of these, like him, in due time were submerged by the adoration of those who loved them, concealed by the love-growth of loyal followers. All these souls

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are inexplicable, as indeed is the soul of Shakespeare, Newton, Lincoln. Indeed the mystery deepens around every babe, of whom the Nazarene said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

I love to think of Jesus as a man whose daily conversation was rich with a "veined humanity." Fragments of that conversation now constitute the immeasurable treasures of the gospel story, the undying maxims of righteousness, and the beckoning standards of the spiritual life. I know that this testimony of history, this chorus of redeemed souls, this elevated humanity that testifies to his power, has been to the great majority of his followers and lovers adequate evidence of his Deity; this fruit, say they, is such as becomes a God and not a man.

But I love to think of this man as one whose divinity is testified to by his human tears, by his affections for the lowly, by his sympathy with the bruised and the broken. I love to think that it was a man's heart that went out to distracted, sin-stained women, to untutored fishermen, and to innocent children whose artless prattle was to him the parables of heaven. I love to think that his divinity came to him through the holy generation of such a father and mother as made regeneration unnecessary. Independent of ecclesiastical formulas, relieved from the traditional accretions of an uncritical age and an unscientific theology, I find him a peasant-prophet whose inherent excellence pierces the darkness that envelops a remote age, an obscure location, and the untutored neighbors who first met him with suspicion and indignation and then surrendered to him their ungrudging love, their uncalculated appreciation.

In short, I am compelled to think that this Light of Souls, this saving and redeeming spirit, was the loved and loving child of Joseph, the carpenter, and the loyal wife, Mary. I believe this, notwithstanding the stories of immaculate conceptions, star-guided magi, choiring angels and adoring shepherds that gathered around the birth-night. In the light of comparative study, all this is the beautiful poetry that unconsciously springs from the untutored heart of after-generations,

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the growth of which is no more mystic than is the growth of the lily from seeds the birds have carried and the winds have planted. The conditions of holy birth and high generation are too subtle for human analysis. The ways of history are the ways of God, and his ways are beyond finding out.

Sokrates was the son of a stone-cutter; Buddha was born in a palace; but cradled in kingly palace, the humble home of an artisan, or born where the cattle were, the same obscurity envelops the origin. All this obscurity does not disprove the glowing fact that a spirit thus cradled did grow into truth-telling, right-seeking, man-loving power. The abject worship and the unlimited rhetoric imbedded in the adoration of subsequent ages testify to the sublime reality.

Said William Hunt, the great philosopher artist of Boston, "Michael Angelo was a soul so great that subsequent generations have given us no man large enough to understand him." The truest thing we can say about the homely face of Abraham Lincoln is that the care-taking lines which make so benignant that face were furrowed by a spirit so large that no one of us is yet fully able to understand him. We shout his name, we prattle his praises, but when it comes to the matter of measurements, the word "man" no more bounds his power than does the word "God." Some center to either we may indicate, but the circumference of both alike are lost beyond the outermost reach of our ken. Indeed, take the variest babe crooning at a loving mother's breast, and

> "Draw who can the mystic line,
> Which is human, which divine."

I read with pleasure the battle hymn in the Book of Joshua that sings of the sun standing still upon Gibeon and of the moon standing still over the Valley of Ajalon that the chosen people might complete their conquest; but I cannot accept this poem as history or allow it to confuse my sense of the divine continuity and the great impartiality of holy law.

There is unspeakable interest in the primitive creation hymn we find in Genesis, but that must not dis-

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turb my faith in the record of the rocks and my interest in the science of geology or astronomy.

The birth and cradle legends of Buddha are fragrant as a flower garden, but in rejecting them as history I am guilty of no irreverence and my denials savor of no profanity.

So with this carpenter's son: I remember that all these gospel narratives are but the inadequate and sometimes incoherent transcription of traditions gathered from the loving but oftentimes fantastic reproduction of the imaginations and recollections of imperfect and untrained minds from fifty to one hundred and fifty years after the fertile life had been closed on Calvary. I remember that the alleged genealogies of this Nazarene are obviously imperfect, fanciful, even grotesque. These very fancies, or those like them, were in the world before the founder of Christianity was born, and the one throws light upon the other.

And so I must go back of legend and miracle, below the myth and tradition, and find more adequate foundations for the reverence of the world and a higher claim for my own interest in and loyalty to the road-side texts and lake-side parables which were dropped into the fertile soil of the human heart where they germinated, bloomed and bore fruit. I know that the peasant was soon lost in the Savior, and that Jesus, who was indeed the Son of God, as was his carpenter father before him, soon became the Christ, or God the Son; a confusion easily explained by the student of psychology; a confusion that was not all a mistake, but there comes a time when the confusion is damaging. Did not he say, "Know ye not that ye are the children of God, and the spirit of God dwelleth in you?"

Mr. Crooker, in his recent book on "The Supremacy of Jesus," estimates that there are some two hundred sayings and twenty-five parables of Jesus found in the New Testament. These sayings and parables of Jesus Thomas Jefferson arranged into one consistent whole, according to his own judgment, and he was delighted to find it a hand-book of morals of superlative value. The Congress of the United States has recently done itself the credit of officially printing a fac-

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simile reproduction of this manuscript book of Thomas Jefferson, which now constitutes one of the treasures of the Congressional library.

Now when Jefferson eliminated the miraculous and the fabulous and the more or less distorted estimates of his inadequate biographers, he was offering no indignity to the Christ of history, still less to the Jesus of the gospel. He was but discriminating in the interest of the gold; laying hold of what is most distinctive, bringing into view the imperishable. Christendom has had a finer instinct than the theologians of Christendom; for the common people in the Christian church have always loved the parables more than the miracles, although the theologians have based their arguments on the miracles. The story of the Good Samaritan has had a power beyond the story of the senseless blighting of the fig tree; the ages have loved to think of Jesus talking with the woman at the well more than they have loved to think of him as manufacturing wine at Cana. No man is so orthodox but that he reads more often the Sermon on the Mount than he does the story of the drowning of the pigs.

In rejecting the incredible birth stories, the authority of the Golden Rule is reaffirmed. The early story of religions everywhere has plenty of unfathered children. The saints and sages of the older world, as a rule, have come into the world heralded by super-mundane signs, over preternatural roads, according to the devout traditions of their grateful followers. The old-world literature is full of miracles, many of them as beautiful and tender as those of the New Testament, but the beautitudes are scarce; the divine charity which was also God-like justice, such as soothed the Magdalen and said to the erring, "Neither do I condemn thee; go sin no more," is as exceptional as it is inspiring. It is between the miracle lines of the New Testament that we discover the man Jesus who "went about doing good."

But do you turn away from Bible texts and point to the facts of history? Very well. Call the splendid roll of martyrs, the white-robed line of saints; offer the majestic cathedrals, the great pictures, sublime music,

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the dauntless crusaders who now in physical armament and again in the more invulnerable armament of the spirit, went forth, reckless of danger, regardless of cost, to rescue the world from heathen hands or to gather souls into the fold of Christ; account the complex activities of missionary societies, reformatories, hospitals, schools, charities, churches, as indisputable evidence that only a God-man could be the adequate source and inspiration of such. Do you urge that all these prove that a God rather than a man must have wrought all this?

Yea, verily, it is the work of God, but the work of God through man, the Divine who tabernacles in the human.

There are other great religious systems in the world. Buddha conquered greater tyrannies, overcame more arrogant pride, broke down the iron walls of caste, made pitiful great sections of humanity, and is today revered by more souls than take upon themselves the name of the Christ.

Buddhism and Christianity hold no monopoly of moral wealth. Humility, love and self-sacrifice, though so little understood, so grudgingly practiced, these have world-wide foundations. There are many world-conquering traditions. Rome under Pagan banners once came near possessing the world; the drum-beat of England is today heard around the globe; certainly that of itself is not adequate proof of the peculiar partiality of God to Anglo-Saxon prowess.

Not all of Christendom is of Jesus; its theology is more of Paul than of the Nazarene, and the time has been when the sword, which Jesus condemned, played an important part in the triumphs of Christendom. Today the ecclesiasticism in which Jesus would have no delight, dominates perhaps the larger sections of Christendom, and this ecclesiasticism, though not of the Christ, is unquestionably an element in historic Christendom.

Jesus ought to be held only partially responsible for Christendom: from him comes one stream, albeit the purest and dearest, into that mighty tide fed from many tributaries. His contribution is not the marvels

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of the Christian faith, but the simplicity of Christian morals. The divine achievements in the Pantheons of the older world, the post-biblical miracles of the Christian church make dim and small the miracles of the New Testament. But the benignities of the beatitudes were refreshing utterances in their day, and succeeding ages have not over-reached the self-sacrificing love, the divine patience, the wide charity, the sublime morality of this son of the carpenter. Science, travel, commerce, learning, criticism, have broken down many a peculiar claim of Christian theology, but all of them unite in glorifying the humanities of the New Testament.

The enthusiasm of the Master finds in Matthew Arnold a champion as unqualified as in Savonarola, and the beatitudes are reflected as joyfully and gratefully in the pages of Emerson as in the sermons of John Wesley. The Man of Nazareth abides while bishops and synods, preachers and deacons, bewail the decline of faith and the waning of Christian doctrine

All that John Fiske wrote and did was in his mind but the wise training of a master workman for what he hoped would be his *magnum opus*, a study of Jesus of Nazareth and the founding of Christianity, an adequate study of which, to his thought, was possible only to one who felt the deep human foundations of the Man of Nazareth. Such a study would find Jesus a mighty factor in human history. Christianity a product of nature, law-environed, and on that account an emanation from God. Such a study must start out with the assumption that

> "The litanies of nations came
> Like the volcano's tongue of flame,
> Up from the burning core below
> The canticles of love and woe."

Such studies indeed justify the poet's vision, for England's abbeys do take their place "with Andes and with Ararat."

But do you turn from text and from history and appeal to psychology? Do you urge that the soul hath need of a supernatural Savior; that the sinner demands a mediator: that the heart hungers for some divine

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expiation, a heaven-sent Redeemer; that the blood of the innocent must needs wash away the stains of the guilty?

Of course this appeal to the soul must be answered by each soul for itself. I may not speak for others, but for myself I ask for no mediation between me and the sunlight. My heart rejoices in the thought of the infinitely near. The thought of God is my sufficient creed.

That is a poor father whose face is dreaded by his child, even in moments of its direst disgrace. No face can be so full of tenderness as the face of infinite love. The eternal justice must be the ultimate resting place of the sin-smitten. As I hope for peace, I ask for nothing less and for nothing more than justice. I have nothing more acceptable to offer to the Divine than the manliness that will not seek even his presence in roundabout ways, though it be by way of Jerusalem or over the top of Calvary. The thought of the Christ as a God sent out of heaven, and caught back to heaven, who by some supernatural procedure may snatch my soul as a brand from the burning, does not satisfy my thought; it lacks the rhythm of the universe, the harmony of justice. As for myself, there is saving power in the thought of a humanity that reaches from Judas to Jesus.

"I will look unto the hills from whence cometh my strength." We valley-dwellers may look up towards mountain heights that are more inspiring than the ranges of the Himalayas—the mountain peaks of soul, the prophetic ranges where we catch glimpses of Socratic heights, Sakya-Muni peaks and Nazarene tablelands; and there is a pathway from each of these to the humblest human heart. From the valley where we are to the rarest tablelands of God, there is a path on which human feet have trod and may still travel.

This conception of Jesus fills me with the ambition of an Alpine climber. I turn away from the theological Christ that I may lay hold of the man Jesus; that I may face dangers as he did; stand censure as he could; endure defeat like him; triumph over death and be glad in my adversity. I love to believe that he

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did as a man nineteen centuries ago in Judea that which I as a man may, aye, ought to dare do today in Chicago. I love to think that as God used his human hands to heal and to soothe in no miraculous fashion, there are such uses in store for my hands. As I see his eyes filled with tears as he stands with Mary and Martha by the open grave, I find unsuspected depths in the wells of sympathy in my own soul. I believe in the splendid manhood of Jesus because I believe in the latent manhood in your soul and mine. In ennobling the man I revere his father—God. Believing in the integrity of Jesus, I substantiate my faith in the integrity of the universe, which works well without intervention or interruption by any order-disturbing power on earth or in heaven. With Emerson, I believe in that heaven my soul forecasts, the heaven revealed in the "shining laws that are to round into full circle and complete grace, linking the law of gravitation with purity of heart, making ought and duty one thing with science, with beauty, and with joy."

I believe that this thought of a humanitarian Jesus, a carpenter's son as a leader of men, gives to religion a broader and deeper foundation than any Christianity that the world has yet known; it makes for a religion that soothes the heart as well as satisfies the head. It gives a religion that is its own evidence. Who can fathom the power of personality? It goes deeper than any external record and it suggests a power more pervasive, more searching than that found in the creeds or the contributions of Christendom.

And yet I realize that the old question is unanswered. Wherein lie the elements of Jesus' power? What constitutes the secret of his leadership?

Light eludes us when we would confine and analyze it; love laughs at our definitions as it does at bolts and bars. A personality is great, not by virtue of its peculiarities, but by virtue of its more splendid embodiment of the universalities. But this we know—that the two sovereign words in the vocabulary of Jesus were "Love" and "Hope." He ministered to the sick and discouraged. He soothed the maniac

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and lifted up the prostrate. Perhaps in these days the verities of hope are more distrusted than even the claims of love. Jesus had tremendous expectations; the one inheritance that filled his soul was the Messianic expectation; the one agitation of his day that absorbed him was that which gave a restless anticipation. He believed mightily in the future, not as some glory-rimmed heaven after death, but as a conquering kingdom of love and justice. Jesus took large stock in tomorrow; he laughed at the prudence that never dares, the mock righteousness of the ledger that presumes to balance the books and pay all accounts up to date. He knew that the prudence of commerce, the thrift of trade, the exclusive pride of the synagogue, must be broken through with a larger hope and a diviner enterprise. He believed there was to be a day after today and recognized his obligation to it; he acknowledged the debt which can never be paid to the past and which is paid only by enlarging the resources of the future. Life, to Jesus, was an open account; he was a forward looker; he was honest enough to recognize his obligations to the unborn. Perhaps this adventurous spirit in the realms of morals, even more than his heart of love, has made him the superlative leader of men.

Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of the movement that has taken his name is represented by the word "missionary"—"one who is sent." "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," is the bugle call sounded so long ago, and the blast has echoed inspiringly throughout nineteen centuries. The spirit that prompted it is a prompting spirit still; the need that made commanding the call then is imperative now. Now as then, there is a tyranny worse than any shackles that ever chafed the ankles of the slave, and that tyranny reaches into our homes and into the church. It is the tyranny of custom, of style, of fashion, of cost, the tyranny of engagements that bind us to our meaner, cheaper selves; the tyranny of the social intercourse that enslaves and dwarfs the spirit; the tyranny of dogma; the tyranny of fear.

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Go forth and preach the gospel of freedom; rescue those who are drifting into imbecility as they float about seeking the most popular preaching, the softest cushioned pew, the place where there is most fashion, the company that calls for the least courage and is satisfied with the least intelligence. Go forth and preach to such. Go demonstrate the freedom that is possible to them, if you would know the power of Jesus. He gives us something to live for, nay, better, something worth dying for; something that is worth investing in.

What the world most needs is the faith of Jesus, not a faith in Christ. The faith of Jesus suggests something to attain; it indicates a measure of living, a standard of loving, a demand upon our lives and our purses. The faith in Christ may suggest credal fences, theological test-lines, something in the name of which we cast reproach upon the sincere and point the door to inquiring souls. The faith of Jesus bids us

"Go put your creed into your deed
Nor speak with double tongue.

"For sea and land don't understand,
Nor skies without a frown
See rights for which the one hand fights
By the other cloven down.

"Be just at home; then write your scroll
Of honor o'er the sea,
And bid the broad Atlantic roll
A ferry of the free.

"And, henceforth, there shall be no chain,
Save underneath the sea
The wires shall murmur through the main
Sweet songs of liberty.

"The conscious stars accord above,
The waters wild below,
And under, through the cable wove,
Her fiery errands go.

"For he that worketh high and wise,
Nor pauses in his plan,
Will take the sun out of the skies
Ere freedom out of man."

Would you follow Jesus? Push on! Climb, dare, and die daring.

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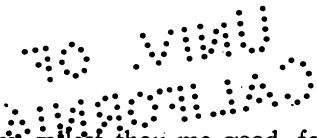

"Why callest thou me good, for there is none good save one—the Father." Would you follow Jesus? Behave yourself and go to work. Out of high adventure, self-denial, oblivion of the past and faith in the future, build for yourself unconsciously the character that is Jesus-like. "Tell the truth?" That is easy. *Be* the truth. Be generous with what a generous universe has bountifully bestowed upon you for immediate investment; now is the accepted hour. Tomorrow is not yours. Today is the only day that is yours.

"Love your enemies?" you say. Yes, but complete your text. "Do *good* to them that hate you; pray for those that despitefully use you."

Would you be of the household of Jesus? Have fellowship with the bad; not for the badness' sake, but for the good that is tragically encrusted there. Weep not chiefly for the starving children of the slums in the back alleys of Jerusalem (there were not many such), but for the thoughtless, shivering egotists who beneath their wide phylacteries "mock heaven with high-sounding prayers." As it was in Jerusalem so is it in Chicago. The dissipated live on the avenues, the perishing on the boulevards.

Dare you call Jesus "Master?" Then, like him, believe in the unbeliever, have a hope for the hopeless, belong to the church of the unchurched; escape from your narrowness; act from principle and not from prudence; divest yourself of all accumulation that holds you down with a complacency that makes you blind not only to the good you ought to do, but to the good you can do. "If thou wouldst be perfect, go sell that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven."

Do you ask me if I am a "Christian?" I do not know. Are you? If any one is inclined to give me that high name, with the spiritual and ethical connotation in mind, I am complimented and will try to merit it. But whenever it is used as a herding song, when Christians are gathered together like sheep in the pen, by themselves, when it becomes the

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pencil on the leg of the compass that marks the circumference of fellowship,—as I honor the great Nazarene leader I refuse the word and deny its limitations and promptly go outside where the son of the carpenter went before me.

I once wore the name "Unitarian" because I loved the hint of unity involved in the name. I now prefer not to wear it for the same reason,—because there is a brotherhood that is mine which the name does not and cannot include. Any word that overlooks or repels the seekers after goodness,—aye, even those who miss goodness and suffer the penalty thereof, is too small a word to represent that procession of which the carpenter's son is a sublime leader. In him the Word became flesh. In so far, then, as I am a man, I am of his household. Through the power of his nobility he became the Son of God. In so far as I partake of that nobility, I also am a son of God. He delighted in the phrase "the Son of Man," which he used many times. In the fullness of this title, he occasionally ventured to call himself the Son of God.

"Man I am and man would be, Love, merest man and nothing more.
Bid me seem no other! Eagles boast of pinions—let them soar!
I may put forth angel's plumage, once unmanned, but not before.

"Now on earth, to stand suffices,—nay, if kneeling serves, to kneel:
Here you front me, here I find the all of heaven that earth can feel."

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Into the woods my Master went,
Clean forspent, forspent.
Into the woods my Master came,
Forspent with love and shame.
But the olives they were not blind to Him,
The little gray leaves were kind to Him:
The thorn-tree had a mind to Him
When into the woods He came.

Out of the woods my Master went,
And he was well content.
Out of the woods my Master came,
Content with death and shame.
When Death and Shame would woo Him last,
From under the trees they drew Him last:
'Twas on a tree they slew Him—last
When out of the woods He came.

—*Sidney Lanier.*

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